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Workers might've put Ricky at risk

Review: State rules neglected

BY JACK KRESNAK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

September 25, 2006

A review of foster care and adoption files at the Jackson County Department of Human Services -- the state agency that placed Ricky Holland in the home of adoptive parents accused in his death -- found that public employees repeatedly failed to follow state licensing rules.

The review by the department's Office of Children and Adult Licensing did not find the kind of widespread violations uncovered recently at the privately operated Lula Belle Stewart Center foster-care agency in Detroit where, after a 2-year-old boy was beaten to death Aug. 16, several foster children were found to be in dangerous or unlicensed foster homes or missing from care.

But OCAL's report on the Jackson County DHS, prepared in the wake of 7-year-old Ricky's death in July 2005, did find nine technical violations of licensing rules and showed a laxity on the part of foster-care and adoption workers that could have placed children at risk of maltreatment.

The review of Jackson County DHS's child-welfare division, written by state licensing consultant Linda Tansil, was completed June 30, but has been withheld by the state DHS pending verdicts in the murder case against Ricky's adoptive parents, Tim and Lisa Holland, who lived in Jackson when the Jackson DHS office placed Ricky in their home.

The trial of Lisa Holland, 33, who is charged with open murder and first-degree child abuse in Ingham County, continues today.

Office penalized after findings

The violations cited in the report resulted in the Jackson County DHS office's placement license being downgraded to a six-month provisional status, according to the report obtained by the Free Press.

A provisional license puts the agency on notice that serious violations occurred, and the agency must write a corrective action plan.

About half a dozen of the state's 241 public and private child-placing agencies have provisional licenses, according to OCAL Director James Gale.

Gale said last week that there are 13 state licensing workers to monitor child-placing agencies as well



Ricky Holland, 7, died in the care of his adoptive parents.

as 250 other institutions that provide care for children. The DHS said the ratio of OCAL workers to licensed facilities and agencies serving children through out-of-home care is 1 to 38.

Asked whether there were enough licensing workers to monitor nearly 500 facilities and agencies, Gale said that "it would be easy to say we need more staff, but we'll do the best job that we can.

"We have challenges in all divisions in terms of having enough staff and being statewide."

He explained that licensing workers deal primarily with documentation and whether all the state's licensing requirements are being met.

Other DHS workers, called purchase of service workers, directly monitor how foster children are supervised in private, nonprofit agencies that are under state contract, and Child Protective Services investigators check into complaints of maltreatment in licensed facilities, he said.

And most of Michigan's licensed child-placing agencies are accredited by national groups that set high standards for care.

What happened with the Hollands

In March, the DHS released the licensing files for the Hollands that covered 2000 to 2005; the names of foster children were whited-out to protect their confidentiality. Those files showed that DHS social services workers generally praised the couple's parenting techniques.

Since then, however, the DHS has withheld virtually all documents related to the Ricky Holland case from public scrutiny, with officials saying the department is trying to protect the parents' rights to a fair trial.

Some Republican legislators, however, have criticized the administration for withholding such records from a special committee investigating the case and others involving children who died despite some DHS contact.

Tim Holland, 37, pleaded guilty Sept. 5 to second-degree murder in Ricky's death. He will testify against his wife.

The couple were cleared by the DHS through criminal background checks and through Child Protective Services' records. DHS also routinely checks references, but the Hollands and thousands of other foster parents were not and are not given psychological tests to detect tendencies that may put foster children at risk.

No names of state social services workers, foster or adoptive children or licensed foster parents are included in the June 30 licensing report.

Mike Nichols, one of Lisa Holland's attorneys, said his client told him that she and her husband decided to become licensed foster parents through Jackson County DHS because they couldn't conceive a child.

Ricky was placed with the Hollands in October 2000, about a month after his biological mother voluntarily turned him over to Child Protective Services in Jackson County because she was homeless.

The Hollands adopted Ricky in 2003, and then adopted his four younger siblings, taking them in as CPS took them into foster care. Lisa Holland gave birth to a girl on May 19, 2004.

In an apparent reference to Ricky's care, the licensing report found few references to the foster-care worker actually seeing the children while they lived with the Hollands.

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Published September 23, 2006

Ricky's mom denigrated him

Witnesses testify Holland didn't want to hear son was OK

What's next

- Lisa Holland's murder trial continues Monday before Ingham County Circuit Judge Paula Manderfield. Expected to testify are Jackson Public Schools officials and some of the Hollands' Williamston neighbors.

By Kevin Grasha
Lansing State Journal

To Ricky Holland's teachers, his bus driver and other Jackson school officials, he was an affectionate and bright young boy, who occasionally caused trouble.

But Ricky's mother often disparaged him and frequently inquired about whether he had misbehaved, several witnesses testified Friday in the Lisa Holland's murder trial.

The Williamston woman is charged with murder and child abuse in the July 2005 death of her 7-year-old adopted son. Lisa's husband, Tim Holland, has pleaded guilty to second-degree murder and is expected to testify against her.

"No matter how many times we told her he was perfect, she always needed to know if there was a problem," said Marcia Polly, who drove the Jackson special education bus Ricky rode in kindergarten and first grade. The Hollands lived in Jackson before moving to Williamston in May 2005.

Lisa Holland's attorneys noted that Ricky was once suspended for two days during his first-grade year for conduct on the bus, including stealing, spitting on a window and hitting other students with his hat.

Polly testified Lisa wanted Ricky's behavior documented, "so she could have the information to give to Ricky's doctor."

Assistant Prosecutor Mike Ferency has said Lisa was exaggerating Ricky's behavioral problems in order to receive more financial assistance from the state. Earlier testimony revealed that about \$450 of the \$907 monthly subsidy the Hollands received for Ricky was due to his special needs.

Polly and her bus attendant, Debra Jones, also said they didn't think Ricky needed to ride the special education bus to Cascades Elementary.

Both said they chose not to use a harness on Ricky that his psychiatrist prescribed and the school said he had to wear.

Jones told Lisa Holland's co-counsel Mike Nichols that she and Polly were reprimanded by their supervisor, after Lisa Holland complained that Ricky was not wearing the harness.

Nichols noted that the school had made a plan that Ricky should ride on the special education bus.

In the spring of Ricky's first-grade year, a school psychologist who was part of a team that evaluated him, said Lisa believed he should be considered a special needs child.

But Suzanne Leach said Ricky's teachers described a different boy than his mother, who seemed to focus on his problems.

"I was trying to let Lisa know Ricky was bright and doing well," Leach said, "and I got the impression ... that was not good news to her - that she did not want to hear that about him."

By the end of the year, Leach testified, Ricky was removed from the school.

Also Friday, testimony revealed that Ricky was removed from Frost Elementary a few weeks into his second-grade year, after it was determined he did not qualify for the special education services Lisa Holland wanted.

Contact Kevin Grasha at 267-1347 or kgrasha@lsj.com.

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Published September 22, 2006

Bus driver: Lisa Holland often negative about son

Midday update

By Kevin Grasha
Lansing State Journal

Lisa Holland was often negative about her son Ricky and frequently wanted to know what he had done wrong, a school bus driver testified Friday in Lisa's murder trial.

"No matter how many times we told her he was perfect, she always needed to know if there was a problem," said Marcia Polly, who drove a Jackson special education school bus that Ricky rode on in kindergarten and first grade.

Lisa Holland is charged with murder and child abuse in the July 2005 death of 7-year-old Ricky. Her husband, Tim Holland, has pleaded guilty to second-degree murder and is expected to testify against her.

Polly and a bus attendant, Debra Jones, also said they didn't think Ricky needed to wear a harness on the bus or that he necessarily needed to be on the special education vehicle.

Defense attorneys for Lisa Holland noted that a child psychiatrist had prescribed the harness and that the school had made a plan that Ricky should ride on the special education bus.

Polly also said it seemed that Ricky was always hungry. Polly said she occasionally looked in his lunch bag and found a couple of pieces of bread and carrot sticks. Later, she testified, his lunch bags would be stapled shut before he got on the bus.

Check out LSJ.com and Saturday's Lansing State Journal for additional updates on the trial.

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Testimony at odds over slain boy's behavior

BY JACK KRESNAK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

September 24, 2006

LANSING -- Who was Ricky Holland?

Contrasting portraits of the impish 7-year-old, who was slain last summer and buried in garbage bags in a mid-Michigan swamp, are emerging during testimony in the murder trial of his adoptive mother.

Was Ricky a sometimes rambunctious -- but normal, even polite -- preschooler who loved to get hugs from adults and knew when his behavior crossed the line, as his teacher testified? Or was he an aggressive, hyperactive child who tested his mother's patience, leading her to conclude that he needed drugs to control his behavior?



Lisa Holland is on trial in the slaying of her adopted son, Ricky Holland. (Holland family photo)

And why, as a first-grader, was the slight, blond-haired, blue-eyed child -- he weighed 55 pounds at his death -- observed voraciously eating food he pilfered out of school trashcans and from other students' lunches and acting out, once breaking an eraser in two and wetting his pants?

It will be up to jurors to put the puzzle pieces together as they ultimately ponder the guilt or innocence of Lisa Holland, 33, who became Ricky's foster mother in October 2000 and later adopted the boy with her husband, Tim. She is charged with open murder and child abuse in Ricky's death. Tim Holland, 37, pleaded guilty to second-degree murder on Sept. 5 and is expected to testify that his wife killed Ricky with a small hammer. Lisa Holland has accused her husband of killing the boy.

Ricky was born in California on Sept. 8, 1997, with the given name Richard M. Gann. He and his mother moved to Michigan in 2000, after Ricky's father was imprisoned on drug charges. His mother voluntarily turned the boy over to the state foster care system in 2000 because she was homeless and didn't have a job.

Ricky wanted very much to please his new foster mother, according to testimony. Just six months after being placed with the Hollands by state social workers, Ricky was calling Lisa "mama."

In January 2001, Lisa Holland enrolled Ricky, then 3, in the Community Action Agency Head Start program in Jackson, where the family lived before moving in May 2005 to the Williamston area.

Barbara Patrick, one of Ricky's Head Start teachers, described Ricky as a typical preschooler in many ways but recalled that he "was kind of funny" in the way he knew when to stop misbehaving.

Patrick employed color-coded slips as a way to keep order. One slip -- green, yellow or red -- would be removed from a board for each instance of misbehavior. Kids who kept at least one slip by day's

end -- red was always the last one removed -- would be rewarded with a star or sticker, Patrick said.

"He would always run over and check by his name and see how many he had left," Patrick said. If there was only a red slip left, his behavior would improve. "He knew when to stop," she said. "He never lost his red slip."

But Lisa Holland, who had three other young foster children in her home at the time, was concerned that Ricky might have attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), Patrick said. For a short time at Lisa Holland's request, Patrick kept a daily journal of Ricky's behavior.

"Ricky can be very defiant," Patrick wrote in one entry. "Sitting can be very hard for Ricky. ... Ricky has a problem following directions."

But Patrick also said Ricky usually was friendly and "loved hugs."

Patrick, who said she never suspected Lisa Holland of abusing Ricky, brought to court a note that Lisa Holland had written on a school form in 2001. "He seems bright and very likable," the note read.

But Lisa Holland also asked Patrick whether Ricky might qualify for Social Security disability payments if found to have behavioral problems such as ADHD or oppositional defiant disorder (ODD).

Psychological testing

At the request of Catholic Social Services in Jackson, which was providing services to Ricky, Jerel Del Dotto, a board-certified child psychologist at Foote Hospital in Jackson, evaluated Ricky in February and March of 2001. Del Dotto testified that Ricky tested about average intellectually, with an IQ of 96, but that he had the language skills of a child about a year older.

During testing for about two hours over two days, Ricky was "somewhat squirmy," testified Zandra Galloway, a Foote Hospital psychometrist, who measures brain-directed activity such as language and motor skills.

But, Galloway wrote in a report that Ricky "redirects well" -- meaning that he easily returned to a task when directed -- and talked positively about his mother, whom Galloway took to mean Lisa Holland.

Ricky repeatedly asked Galloway, "Can you tell mama I did a good job?"

Del Dotto said his assessment included input from Lisa Holland, teacher Patrick and his own observations as well as Galloway's. Lisa Holland's written comments mentioned several instances of the boy being aggressive, hyperactive and defiant at home and said she hoped that the doctors would find out whether Ricky had ADHD or ODD.

"We want him to live a normal a life as possible," Lisa Holland wrote for the evaluation.

Del Dotto, however, said the problems Holland reported didn't jibe with the experiences of Patrick and Galloway and his own observations. Consequently, Del Dotto said he could not make that diagnosis but placed Ricky in a "catchall" category called disruptive behavior disorder.

The psychologist did not know about an incident later in March or April 2001, when Ricky became angry and frustrated after a visit with his biological mother. Ricky knocked over a chair, tried to hit and kick teachers in the Head Start program and had to be given a time-out, Patrick said.

Then in February 2002, Ricky's therapist at Catholic Social Services, Susan Honeck, noticed what looked like a rope burn on Ricky's left wrist. Ricky told her that "it's from the rope that they tie me in bed with at night."

Honeck immediately called Child Protective Services and an investigator interviewed Ricky that day. Honeck said she was told later that CPS did not substantiate abuse.

Lisa Holland's attorney, Andrew Abood, said Thursday that the CPS investigator reported that Ricky gave other explanations for the marks on his wrist.

Diagnosis doubled care subsidy

Peggy Cox, Ricky's first-grade teacher at Cascades Elementary in Jackson during 2003-2004, testified that Ricky ate food he took out of trashcans and from other students. Cox said that at Lisa Holland's request, she began to document Ricky's misbehaviors, including that he stood on his chair, broke an eraser in half and wet his pants.

Lisa Holland apparently gave those reports to a Jackson psychiatrist treating Ricky.

Eventually, the psychiatrist, Aurif Abedi, who has yet to testify, diagnosed Ricky in 2004 as having ADHD and ODD, plus impulse control disorder, intermittent explosive disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder and bipolar disorder. The doctor prescribed several psychotropic drugs.

Those diagnoses and other behavioral problems reported by Lisa Holland and Jackson Public Schools officials eventually led the state Department of Human Services to set a high difficulty-of-care subsidy for Ricky that would double the foster care payments to the Hollands, to \$907 a month. The money continued as a subsidy after the Hollands adopted Ricky in 2003.

Ingham County Assistant Prosecutor Mike Ferency contends that Lisa Holland manipulated the psychiatrist and others to get Ricky labeled as emotionally or psychologically disturbed so she could collect more money from the state.

But defense attorney Abood said the notion that money was a motive is absurd because Lisa Holland did not stand to gain financially by Ricky's death.

The trial continues Monday and is expected to last until mid-October.

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Canton foster mom questioned; girl, 2, in critical condition

By RUBY L. BAILEY

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

September 22, 2006

Canton Township police are interviewing the foster mother of a two-year-old girl who sustained life-threatening injuries early Friday morning.

The girl is in critical condition at the University of Michigan Mott Children's Hospital in Ann Arbor, said Canton Police Sergeant Rick Pomorski.

"There were injuries to the head that were believed to have caused bleeding in the brain and bruises to the forehead," Pomorski said.

Pomorski said the foster mother reported the girl's injuries within 24 hours of the incident and is cooperating with police. Police arrived at the home on Emily Court around 2 a.m. and found the girl unresponsive.

"We've been given one explanation and we're trying to confirm it with the foster mother," he said.

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September 25, 2006

Canton Twp. probes toddler's death

Jennifer Chambers / The Detroit News

CANTON TOWNSHIP -- An autopsy set today for a 2-year-old foster care child from Canton Township should reveal whether her death was the result of foul play or an accidental injury.

The Washtenaw Office of the Medical Examiner is expected to begin its investigation this morning into the death of Allison Newman, who was found by her foster mother unresponsive in bed at 2 a.m. Friday.

The foster mother called 911 and administered cardiopulmonary resuscitation to the girl. The child was later flown to the University of Michigan C.S. Mott Children's Hospital. She died Saturday.

The mother told police the girl had hit her head the day before but seemed fine all day.

The girl is the second foster child to die in Wayne County recently. Isaac Lethbridge, 2, died of blunt force trauma Aug. 16 at Children's Hospital of Michigan. He was in the custody of a foster care home in Detroit when he died.

Canton Township police investigators interviewed the mother and released her, Sgt. Mark Gajeski said Sunday. The father was not home at the time of the incident. A 3-month-old boy, also a foster care child, was removed from the home.

"We are waiting for autopsy result to see if the child's injuries are comparable with her (mother's) story," Gajeski said.

Residents of the upscale neighborhood full of stately brick homes near Haggerty Road and Michigan Avenue were stunned by the news.

One neighbor said the couple planned to adopt the little girl.

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Hearing ahead over child porn

Saturday, September 23, 2006

THE BAY CITY TIMES

BAY CITY -- A 46-year-old man who has worked as an umpire for boys baseball games faces up to seven years in prison after an FBI probe led to child pornography charges, prosecutors say.

Bay City resident Franklin F. Rivette faces a Thursday hearing before District Judge Timothy J. Kelly on counts including using computers to commit a crime, distributing child sexually abusive activity and accosting children for immoral purposes, authorities said.

His lawyer, however, said the hearing likely will take place in October. Rivette is free on a \$25,000 bond.

If convicted, Bay County Prosecutor Kurt C. Asbury said Rivette faces four to seven years in prison.

Asbury said Rivette, who works for a tire company in Saginaw, came under the scrutiny of the FBI computer crime unit after Bay City police received a complaint about him.

Defense attorney Robert Dunn said the charges make it appear that Rivette had sexual contact with an underage person, but that isn't true.

"He has a fascination with online sexual material, and this is treatable," Dunn said. "He is in counseling for this and has been even before his arrest."

Dunn said Rivette had online contact with people through his MySpace

.com account.

"I'm not sure of the sequence of events, but at one point he was contacted by an undercover policeman in New Hampshire," Dunn said.

Dunn said that authorities have said Rivette wanted the person -- who he thought was an underage boy -- to come to Bay City.

"Actually, it was the other way around," Dunn said. "The undercover police officer tried to get him to go there."

Bay County Pony League officials said authorities had not contacted them about Rivette. League officials said there have been no complaints against him in connection with his work as an umpire. v

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Man who solicited 'girl' on Web gets 3-10 years

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Saturday, September 23, 2006

By Ken Palmer

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A Flint man charged with soliciting an underage girl for sex and exposing himself over the Internet is headed to prison for at least three years.

Over a four-month period, Michael G. Wolosonowich, 32, had sexually explicit conversations with an undercover officer posing as a 14-year-old girl, suggesting they meet at a hotel, investigators said.

On Friday, Genesee Circuit Judge Geoffrey L. Neithercut gave Wolosonowich 3-10 years in prison, saying he wants to send a message to those who might start "fooling around in this nonsense."

"This is something that society fears highly," the judge said. "I'm glad nobody got hurt by this, but I don't know (how many others you talked to)."

Wolosonowich was one of two local men caught in an Internet sex sting run by state Attorney General Mike Cox's child protection unit.

Edward T. Hilgris, 24, of the Clio area is awaiting trial on five counts each of using the Internet to solicit a minor and using a computer to distribute obscene material to a minor.

Investigators claim he chatted with three undercover officers he believed to be minors, officials said.

Wolosonowich pleaded guilty to two felony counts in August.

Cox's office said Wolosonowich exposed himself over a Web cam on two occasions and used lewd language while chatting with someone he thought to be an underage girl.

Investigators tried to set up a meeting with Wolosonowich at the Genesee Valley shopping center, but he never showed, court records say.

They arrested him at his home June 15 after telling him they were investigating a homicide and wanted him to look at photos, according to court records.

Defense attorney Justin Henry said Wolosonowich's behavior was fueled by a serious alcohol problem. Wolosonowich has two young children and recently lost his job, Henry said.

"People are able to get on the Internet, and they try to live a different life,"

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Henry said.

"It's an anonymous life. I think they do things they wouldn't ordinarily do."

Wolosonowich, who denied most of the allegations before pleading guilty, told Neithercut on Friday he was sorry for his actions.

He has five misdemeanor convictions and is set to be sentenced next month in Tuscola County for his third drunken driving offense, court records say.



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Article published Sep 24, 2006

Foster child dies following trauma

Canton police are investigating how a Canton toddler died following a serious head trauma at her home early Friday morning. The 2-year-old girl was taken to University of Michigan Mott Children's Hospital and subsequently died.

The girl's foster mother voluntarily went Friday afternoon to the Canton Police Department for questioning.

According to Canton police, the foster mother called police just after 2 a.m. Friday, reporting that the little girl was unresponsive and not breathing.

She was rushed from her home in the 2600 block of Emily Court in southeast Canton to Annapolis Hospital in Wayne, then was taken by helicopter to Ann Arbor.

At the time the 40-year-old foster mother called police, she and the toddler and another foster child, a 3-month-old baby boy, were home alone. The woman's husband was not at home, and was out of town at the time, according to Canton Police Sgt. Rick Pomorski.

Police did not know Friday afternoon how long the children had been in the woman's care.

The baby boy was immediately placed in care of the foster care agency, Pomorski said.

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Article published Sep 24, 2006

Charges pending autopsy in toddler's death

An autopsy is scheduled Monday to determine the cause of death of a 2-year-old Canton Township girl who suffered serious head injuries while in the care of her foster mother.

Canton police Sgt. Jerry Hardesty said Allison Newman died at 4:20 a.m. Saturday morning after being removed from life support at Mott Children's Hospital in Ann Arbor.

The unidentified foster mother called police from their home in the 2600 block of Emily Court shortly after 2 a.m. Friday morning, telling officers the toddler was unconscious and not breathing. The mother told authorities the girl hit her head the previous day, but appeared to be well.

Canton police and the state Department of Human Services are investigating. Hardesty said no charges have been filed pending autopsy results by the Washtenaw County Medical examiner.



shattered bond

Sunday, September 24, 2006

By Scott Hagen

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A mother accused of spanking the skin off her son and tying him up in the basement. Another accused of helping her boyfriend rape her disabled daughter. A third guilty of letting a convicted sex offender roam free with her 5-year-old girl.

Three recent Jackson County cases illuminate an apparent broken bond between mother and child.

It has left a community asking why some mothers betray their young.

"It horrifies us, especially if it is done by someone the child trusts," said Kelly Schweda, who works with child victims of sexual abuse at the AWARE shelter in Jackson. "It's a whole new category of trauma."

Overall cases of child abuse in Jackson County have remained relatively steady over the last five years at 50 to 60 a year. But, there has been an increase in the more serious crimes against children in 2006, according to statistics from the county prosecutor's office.

Charges of first- and second-degree child abuse have already hit a five-year high, with 19 cases recorded this year through the end of August.

In 2005, there were 17 cases for the entire year; the 2004 total was seven.

"Traditionally, the literature seems to suggest economic stressors do lead to a rise in household violence," said Assistant Prosecutor Allison Bates, who frequently works with victims of physical and sexual abuse.

Sexual assaults against children in 2006 are comparable with past years, with 17 cases of first- and second-degree CSC reported this year. That's middle of the pack for five years of data reviewed.

Experts in child abuse and sexual assault say there is no simple explanation for such abuse, but several factors can contribute to a mother's betrayal of her child. It could be past abuse. It could be abandonment. It could be an overriding fear of being alone.

"From the mother's point of view, the children may be irrelevant," said James Pedigo, director of the Joseph Peters Institute in Philadelphia, that works with sexual offenders and the victims of sexual offenses.

"She may have some feelings of wanting to protect them and take care of them," Pedigo said. "But those feelings may be submerged by her desperate need to protect and defend the relationship with the man who is with her."

Recent cases

No one can know for sure what prompted Margaret Anderson to allow a convicted sex offender to move into her home on Lansing Avenue. The offender, Timothy Watson, was accused of sexually assaulting Anderson's 5-year-old daughter in February.

Watson pleaded guilty to assault with intent to commit sexual penetration in May. This past week, Anderson was sent to jail for 42 days and sentenced to five years of probation for attempted second-degree child abuse.

"A parent has certain obligations to their children," said Circuit Judge Edward Grant in sentencing Anderson. "They're helpless."

One Jackson mother and her boyfriend -- Jeannine Nyies and

Ian Anderson -- are winding through court charged with skinning the buttocks off her son, 6, with a plastic spatula and forcing him to sit alone for hours, tied up, in a dank basement in August.

Another Jackson mother, April Kurtz, and her boyfriend, Justin Howard, were charged in August in the rape of the woman's 11-year-old daughter, who is in a wheelchair and has cerebral palsy.

Accusations, and arrests, of parental rape are extremely rare in Michigan. In 2002, only five parents were accused of raping their children. In 2003, the number goes up to six, with only three parental rape claims in 2004, the most recent year data are available.

Lingering effects

It's rare, which makes it more appalling. Sexual assault cases, in particular, suck children into a world of sexuality they are not ready for.

"With the really little kids, they don't understand it, they only have a framework for understanding that it's wrong," said Bates. "As they get older, they start to understand the sexual implications."

These situations can begin a terrible cycle, experts say.

Those raped and assaulted at a young age typically act out in inappropriate ways, have a difficult time trusting, and sometimes slip into deep levels of depression.

"It's all trauma," said AWARE's Schweda. "It's when a parent violates that trust ... that child has to learn the parent can't meet their needs for security, and that's all the child wants."

The grandmother of the 11-year-old whose mother is accused of helping her boyfriend rape her said her granddaughter has gone into a shell.

The grandmother, whose name is not being used to protect the victim's identity, said she will catch her granddaughter looking out the window or drifting off in thought and ask if she misses her mom.

"She always says no," the grandmother said. "If you mention her mom's name, she doesn't want to talk about her. She pushes it away."

No simple answers

But while the affects of abuse are well-documented, the psychological forces that push a parent, particularly a mother, to betray or abuse a child are not so simple.

"The women involved often will do things for boyfriends they wouldn't ordinarily do because they feel desperate to preserve the relationship," said Pedigo.

Psychological problems also may play a part. For example, Kurtz and Howard have been sent from jail for mental evaluations.

Answers as to why these Jackson-area mothers may have betrayed their children may still be answered, at least in part, as these cases work through the court system. Nyies and Ian Anderson will stand trial sometime this fall. Kurtz and Howard are scheduled for a preliminary examination in December.

Perhaps they will provide some explanation, and answer the question many in the community have been asking: Why?



Jackson infant suffocates while sleeping

Sunday, September 24, 2006

By Scott Hagen

shagen@citpat.com -- 768-4929

A 4-month old Jackson girl died early Saturday when her 1-year-old sister accidentally suffocated the infant while she slept, police said.

Jaishauna Meeks was rushed to Foote Hospital about 4:40 a.m. and pronounced dead on arrival, Jackson police said. An autopsy is scheduled to determine the exact cause of death.

Police said the baby and the older sister were sleeping on a mattress on the floor of their apartment in the 1400 block of Blair Park.

The 22-year-old mother of the children, Loni Potter, and her boyfriend, Shaun Meeks, 20, were asleep on another mattress in the room.

Potter woke up and saw the older child on top of the infant, said Jackson police Lt. Aaron Kantor. The baby wasn't breathing.

"She screamed, gave the baby to the boyfriend and ran next door to call 911," Kantor said. "Preliminarily it appears as if the baby suffocated under the weight of the sibling."

Police still are investigating the death.

Officers executed a search warrant at the house and took evidence "as part of a routine investigation involving a baby death," Kantor said.

The child did not appear to have any bruises or signs of physical abuse, but the autopsy is necessary to confirm the cause of death, Kantor said.

Autopsy results should be available early this week.

"At this point in the investigation we have no information that would lead us to believe foul play was involved," he said. "The mother was very distraught over this tragic accident."

Officers contacted Children Protective Services as standard procedure in a child's death, Kantor said.

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Autopsy scheduled after fatal injuries to Canton toddler

Girl hit her head but was OK later, foster mom says

BY MARISOL BELLO

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

September 24, 2006

A Canton toddler who suffered serious head injuries while in the care of her foster mother died early Saturday at the University of Michigan Mott Children's Hospital in Ann Arbor.

The 2-year-old girl, identified as Allison Newman, died at 4:20 a.m. after she was removed from life support, Canton Sgt. Chuck Raycraft said.

Canton police and the state Department of Human Services are investigating. An autopsy is to be performed Monday.

Allison is the second child to die recently in the care of a foster family. On Aug. 16, 2-year-old Isaac Lethbridge died of a beating in a Detroit foster home. Police are investigating.

In a 911 call made at 2:12 a.m. Friday, Allison's 40-year-old foster mother told the operator that the child was unconscious and not breathing.

"She hit her head yesterday, but she was fine all day," said the woman, whose name was not released by police. She could be heard giving mouth-to-mouth resuscitation as the operator walked her through it.

"Oh my God, oh my God -- are they coming?" the woman asked about paramedics at one point, after telling the operator the child was not moving.

The woman, whose husband was away on a business trip, was alone in the house with the toddler and an infant, according to the 911 tape.

Neighbors identified the couple as Carol and Alan Poole, and the 911 call came from a home in the 2600 block of Emily Court that is owned by a couple with that name, according to Wayne County property records.

Neighbors described the couple as genial and said they have lived in the house for about seven years.

Neighbor Saleem Bokhari said the couple planned to adopt the toddler, who had been with them since the beginning of the year, and the other infant, a boy, who had lived with them for about three months. As far as they knew, neighbors said the two children were the couple's only foster children.

"They were very happy," Bokhari said. "They are a great family."

Allison was placed in the home by Lutheran Social Services, said DHS spokeswoman Karen Stock. Stock would not provide any information about the infant but said in such circumstances, other foster children in the home are immediately removed.

Contact **MARISOL BELLO** at 313-222-6678 or bello@freepress.com.

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Court creates safe exchange zone for parents, kids

Sunday, September 24, 2006

By Kyla King

The Grand Rapids Press

In 2005, Kent County Family Court Judge Daniel Zemaitis asked jurists in his division to participate in a simple but telling straw poll.

They were to make a note over a 60-day period each time they came across a family involved in domestic violence, child abuse, sexual abuse, or stalking who could use a safe, court-operated location for supervised child visitation and exchange.

The result? Almost 50 circumstances fit the bill.

"We knew we were on the right track," Zemaitis said.

The results encouraged him to continue pursuing federal funds to create a program to keep visitations on neutral territory and exchanges from occurring inside police stations.

Now his efforts are being rewarded.

A program will be set up in the downtown Grand Rapids YWCA after Kent County administrators received word last week that \$350,000 had been secured from the Office of Violence Against Women.

The "Safe Place" center will be similar to three others in the state and provide a secure location where parents can arrive at different times. About 80 custodial parents and their children with 280 families are expected to be served during the two-year pilot program that will open in January.

"They can have visitation or exchange without having to come face-to-face with their partner," said Carla Blinkhorn, executive director of YWCA of West Central Michigan, who will oversee the program. "This also reduces a lot of anxiety for the kids."

The program has been literally a life saver for a 37-year-old mother of two who agreed to speak to The Press as long as her name was not used.

The Traverse City resident has been using a similar program to allow her daughters to visit her ex-husband, whom she divorced after a brain injury caused him to develop a paranoid personality disorder.

His condition led him to collect guns and have violent outbursts that culminated when he pointed a loaded weapon at her. She and her children went to a domestic violence center the next day, but even since the divorce her husband has attempted to follow her and find out where she lives.

With plans to move to Chicago soon, she intends to use the Grand Rapids "Safe Place" center because the location is halfway between the two cities.

"I know when he does see them there's no chance that they're going to be harmed, or I'm going to be harmed. And it gives them the opportunity to have some kind of healthy relationship with their dad."

The Grand Rapids program will work similar to the one in Traverse City, which requires her husband to arrive 20 minutes before the scheduled visit. He is checked in at a separate entrance and then escorted to a visitation room where he is locked in with a staff member.

His ex-wife then arrives five minutes before the meeting at an opposite entrance and is taken to a room that locks from the inside before her daughters are taken to see their father while a staff member is present.

After the visit, her ex-husband remains in the locked room with a staff member for 20 minutes after she and her children leave the building.

"It's nice because kids aren't having to witness all the grow-up stuff," she said.

"They should just know they have two parents that love them and want to spend time with them, not all the ugly stuff."

Send e-mail to the author: kking@grpress.com

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ROCHELLE RILEY: Protect foster children

BY ROCHELLE RILEY

FREE PRESS COLUMNIST

September 24, 2006

The state House passed legislation last week setting higher standards for driver's ed students and instructors. A House committee reported out legislation requiring drug tests for welfare recipients who are suspected of using. And legislators wasted time pretending to pass a campaign reform bill that will probably die.

But what the state Legislature should have been doing was zeroing in on why children are dying in foster care, shelters -- or after being adopted.

In each of several recent cases, state employees responsible for monitoring the children had no idea they were in danger. These children are or were a precious state responsibility. How many deaths will it take?

Since 2002, 99 children have died in Michigan's foster system. Officials contend that only three of those deaths were from abuse or neglect; the rest were from accidents, suicides or natural causes. Sadly, Isaac Lethbridge was among 11 children who have died so far this year.

Isaac's story

On Aug. 16, Isaac , who was only 2, was beaten to death in the foster home of Charlise Adams-Rogers.

Little Isaac was placed in her home through the Lula Belle Stewart Center in Detroit, whose license now has been suspended. Child Protective Service investigators, who came to Detroit after Isaac died:

- Learned that Lula Belle had placed seven foster children in dangerous environments.
- Could not initially find six children who were not where they were placed.
- Could not immediately find 21 children, but later did locate 19 of them.
- Learned that foster care workers broke the law by not reporting suspected abuse.

While a Department of Human Services spokeswoman called Isaac's murder "an enormous tragedy" Tuesday, no one had been arrested for it by Friday.

And legislators spent last Tuesday talking about welfare drug testing and cable fees.

Children's civil rights

Here are the saddest parts:

The Lula Belle Stewart center is appealing its suspension.

DHS officials cannot say whether that center's problems are not also a problem at other agencies, which are monitored by overburdened, and sometimes burned out, caseworkers.

And then there's that lawsuit that a New York-based children's rights group filed to force the courts to oversee Michigan's troubled system.

The suit charges that our state violates children's civil rights by keeping them in foster care too long and placing and re-placing them repeatedly in first one foster home, then another.

Eighty percent of children placed in foster care in Wayne County in 2001 lived in more than one foster home during the year. Four years later, 60% still were moved between homes. Some youth age out of foster care after having lived in as many as 15 homes or shelters.

Kids are dying while legislators are debating cervical cancer vaccinations to keep kids from dying.

No wonder New Yorkers are suing us to take better care of our children.

Contact **ROCHELLE RILEY** at rriley99@freepress.com or 313-223-4473.

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Kids need homes

Recruiting effort must find more foster parents in Flint

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Monday, September 25, 2006

Good foster parents should qualify for sainthood, as the rescuing and caring of children from frequently desperate circumstances is truly God's work.

Sadly, the Flint area needs to identify more of these special people to provide homes for the growing number of youngsters being removed, at least temporarily, from households where abuse or neglect has been confirmed.

This is especially true in north Flint and other city neighborhoods where there's a push to find more foster parents so children can remain in their community. Normally, they would be more comfortable staying close by than in Lansing, Port Huron or other strange surroundings.

The numbers tell the need. In the past five years, three out of four children taken from their homes in Genesee County came from ZIP codes covering Flint neighborhoods. Neglect by far was the main cause, rather than abuse, and poverty is a common thread.

Therefore, the state Department of Human Services in its new Family to Family program will try to keep children in a troubled home if the neglect is merely related to a money problem that can be solved.

But if the problem goes deeper, and removal is essential for a child's welfare, the state's goal is to find relatives or neighbors to ease the adjustment to foster care, which on average lasts 15 months. During that period, a parent - usually a single mother - has a year to improve her life to where authorities, which include the Family Court, agree she should regain custody.

In extreme cases, the state moves for termination of parental rights quickly, which means a child would face foster or institutional care until he or she becomes an adult, or is adopted.

Because of the large number of Flint youngsters in this predicament, the county DHS estimates it could use 100 more foster care homes locally, which makes implementing the Family to Family program here a tall order. While the state pays foster parents for their services, and gives a clothing allowance and other support, no adult who assumes this role responsibly does more than break even financially. However, many who provide this care - some for many years - must believe they are enriched in other ways.

QUICK TAKE

How to become a foster parent

- Contact the Genesee County Department of Human Services or a private child-placing agency in the area. DHS can be reached at (810) 760-2217.

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Safe havens for unwanted babies

Signs show where mothers can leave newborns, no questions asked.

PUBLISHED: September 24, 2006

By Gina Joseph
Macomb Daily Staff Writer

Health officials are hoping new signs will boost awareness surrounding Michigan's Safe Delivery of Newborns law.

"This is the first time sites have been identifiable," said Captain Gregg Shipman of the Mount Clemens Fire Department as he stood next to the sign posted on the fire hall window. Measuring 18-inches square, it features the Michigan mitt along with the Upper Peninsula surrounding a bundled infant and white letters spelling out Safe Delivery Site.

"Public awareness is the key to whether this law will be effective or not," said Jean Hoffman, Safe Delivery Program consultant and a former director with the Department of Human Services. "You can anonymously and safely surrender a newborn. No questions asked!"

That's the law.

Many people don't know.

Drafted in the wake of a horrific phenomenon in which teen mothers, some of whom concealed their pregnancy and had given birth alone, were discarding their newborns in trashcans Dumpsters and even a carwash, it allows adolescent and young adult parents to give up a newborn without facing criminal charges. In 1999, Texas had 13 babies who were abandoned within a 10-month period, according to an article by the Florida Ledger. Lawmakers there were the first to pass the country's safe-haven legislation. That same year in Michigan, a newborn boy died after being left by his 17-year-old mother outside a Warren church in the cold November air, prompting a similar law effective Jan. 1, 2001. Previously, any woman who abandoned a

newborn faced a penalty of up to 15 years in prison. Since the law has been in effect, 40 babies have been surrendered.

Kylie was one of them.

Her mother gave birth to her in an area hospital and then surrendered her to hospital personnel. Twelve hours after she was born she was placed with a loving family.

"She's just a little light that shines," said Kylie's mother, who asked to remain anonymous. "She is a sweet natured child with beautiful gold eyes. People look at her and say, 'Isn't she cute.' Then Kylie smiles and they say, 'Isn't she beautiful!'"

There is no agency that tracks child abandonment data. However, based on media reports since 2001, the Safe Delivery Program estimates that there have been approximately 12 abandonments despite the law. Three were in the last year: a 4-day-old infant was found outside a banquet hall in Detroit in a shoebox; a 28-year-old truck driver found a baby swaddled in a towel and crocheted blanket on his doorstep; a baby wrapped in red jogging pants and a garbage bag with her face exposed and umbilical cord still attached was discovered on the doorstep of a church in Detroit.

"Just recently there was a case turned down," said Paula Springer, a spokeswoman with Adoption Associates of Farmington Hills, the agency that placed Kylie.

Under the Safe Delivery of Newborns law parents may bring an unharmed newborn, up to 72 hours old, to a fire station, police department or hospital without fear of prosecution. But they must leave the newborn with a uniformed or otherwise identified employee (Emergency Service Provider) who is inside the building and on duty. In this case the birth father called the hospital and said his girlfriend just had a baby in the car and they didn't want it. He arrived with the newborn wrapped in an old coat, but instead of handing the baby to a nurse placed the bundle off in the driveway. This is considered abandonment. The baby was placed with Children's Protective Services.

"They thought they were doing the right thing," Springer said. But the baby is likely to remain in legal limbo since there's no way to contact the parent for permission to give the baby up for adoption.

Incidents like this made it obvious to Safe Delivery Program organizers that public awareness had faltered. So a group was formed to rekindle it. New signs posted at 24-hour emergency service providers throughout the state, as suggested by a Michigan firefighter who saw them used in Florida, is part of the plan. There

are also new guidebooks that outline the law and provide emergency service providers with a safe delivery surrender checklist.

"All firefighters have looked at it, but you forget things," Shipman said, referring to the law. "Now, if a mother comes here to drop off a baby I can go in here and find out what I'm suppose to do."

A flowchart, for example, leads the providers through crucial steps such as encouraging the birth mother to volunteer her medical history. Kylie's mother left a name and address for references later, but it turned out to be fictitious.

Critics of safe-haven laws, now in 42 states, believe that it's unrealistic to think a girl scared enough to hurt or abandon her infant will stroll into a public place and surrender her baby to a police officer or firefighter. But advocates maintain the law is working, and the more people know about it the more it will help.

"Safe Delivery was never intended to replace good adoption planning or exploring other options as a parent," Hoffman said. "But anytime we can save a life we need to."

Staff reports contributed to this article.

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http://www.macombdaily.com/stories/092406/loc_babies001.shtml



Fathers fight for equal rights

Of The Oakland Press

Though his relationship was over, Michael Ross expected to equally share in the responsibility of rearing his three children.

Then came shocking news. He was told he could see his kids for a few hours every week and every other weekend.

"I felt like my children were kidnapped," he said.

Ross, a physician from Troy, is pushing a joint custody bill that he and others believe would give parents greater rights and improve the well-being of children. Supporters will rally beginning at noon Wednesday on the steps of the Capitol in Lansing.

House Bill 5267 says that in a custody dispute between parents, the court will order joint custody in an agreement that gives each parent a chance to equally participate in a relationship with their child. Exceptions would be if the court clearly finds a parent unfit or unwilling to care for a child, or if a parent moves outside a school district where a child is attending.

The legislation is controversial. The State Bar of Michigan's Board of Commissioners voted unanimously in January to oppose the bill in principle. The Michigan conference of the National Organization for Women also opposes it.

A letter on the State Bar's Web site says the bill would eliminate, "a judge's ability to weigh the facts and circumstances surrounding a custody hearing."

The letter, signed by State Bar general counsel Janet Welch and Elizabeth Lyon, public policy program analyst, says the bill could have a chilling effect on a domestic violence victims' willingness to file for divorce.

"The perception of an increased risk of joint custody and thus a heightened possibility of having to maintain regular contact with an abuser would be apt to cause additional stress to a victim, and discourage divorce filings by victims."

Ross counters that proof of domestic violence would make a parent unfit, which is addressed in the bill.

Ross is concerned with a section of the Social Security Act that he says creates a model for families to begin functioning in separate pieces, by requiring a non-custodial parent who pays child support to be largely absent in a child's life.

He said having both parents involved in a child's life has important positive developmental impacts.

Ross said a "crumbling family infrastructure" has a ripple effect.

"The family is the basic unit of assembly of the community," he said. "If you want a strong community, you need to have strong families. Strong families leads to strong relationships, that leads to strong neighborhoods, that leads to strong communities, that leads to strong nations."

If approved, Ross said, the legislation would save money and, over time, shrink the Friend of the Court system. Friend of the Court offices make recommendations to judges on child custody, support and parenting.

Every county in Michigan has a Friend of the Court office. Offices are funded by a mix of federal and county money. Marcia McBrien, public information officer for the Michigan Supreme Court, said there are about 800,000 open child support cases in the state.

Violet Downs of Highland Township supports the bill. When her son, Brian, and his wife got divorced, a judge granted the woman sole custody and allowed her to take their three children more than 2,000 miles from their home in Arizona to Grand Rapids. He also went to Michigan and has visitation rights but wants joint custody.

Brian was an involved dad who took his kids to music and tennis lessons. Neighbors and others testified on his behalf at his hearing.

"I don't think they should ever let a mother take her children away, unless they're not being treated well," Violet Downs said.

Mark Havas of Rochester Hills is in a messy battle with his wife over the custody of his son.

While there may be a perception that women often get the upper hand in divorce cases, Havas said, "It's not just the dads being left out. Moms are being left out, too."

Ross formed the Family Rights Coalition in November 2004. He suggested the bill to Rep. Bob Gosselin, R-Troy.

Rep. Leslie Mortimer, R-Horton, is the chief sponsor of the bill, which was introduced in 2005. The legislation has been in the Family and Children Services Committee for about a year.

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http://www.theoaklandpress.com/stories/092506/loc_2006092532.shtml



THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

The check's not in the mail

County switches child support money to direct deposit, debit

Monday, September 25, 2006

BY SUSAN L. OPPAT

News Staff Reporter

Washtenaw County's child support recipients won't be receiving a check in the mail next month.

Instead, the county's 20,831 court-ordered child support payments will be distributed through direct deposit or credits on a free, prepaid debit card - as required under a 2004 federal law - said Maureen Sorbet, a spokeswoman for the Michigan Department of Human Services.

The switch is expected to save the state an estimated \$2 million a year in mailing and check-issuing charges.

Michigan has been enrolling its counties into the electronic payment program every month since November. Livingston County switched its 7,236 accounts to electronic payment in February.

Previously, about 30 percent of the 777,188 child support payments in the state were sent directly to recipients' personal bank accounts. Individuals already enrolled in direct deposit will not be required to switch to VISA debit cards.

In addition to state savings, the department said the move will allow instant access to money on the day payments are issued, eliminate lost or stolen checks and check-cashing fees, and eliminate returned mail and delays when clients don't keep addresses current with the state.

Washtenaw County child support recipients got the first of three notices about the change earlier this month. They can choose between direct deposit and prepaid debit cards until the end of the month.

Recipients who do not indicate a preference will automatically be issued a prepaid debit card, which can be used at no cost wherever debit cards are accepted to make purchases and get cash back. The cards also can be used to obtain cash at banks and credit unions, but recipients who use them at ATMs will be liable for ATM fees.

In 2005, the state disbursed \$37.7 million in court-ordered child support in Michigan.

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Friend of the Court to shine light on county 'deadbeats'

[Print Page](#)

By GARY A. SCHLUETER
Sentinel-Standard writer

IONIA - Ionia County's "deadbeat dads" and their counterparts, "immoral moms" are due for unwelcome attention if they don't pay back child support on a timely basis.

"Through a cooperative effort with the Sentinel-Standard, the names of individuals who have active bench warrants will soon be published in the paper on a periodic basis," according to a press release from the Ionia County Friend of the Court.

The Sentinel-Standard places a select few of its top stories of the day on its Web site. The Sentinel-Standard will soon offer an E-edition that will feature its full newspaper online, completely searchable and printable with the opportunity to magnify stories and photos. Look for it in the next few months. In the meantime, please call (616) 527-2100 between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. to subscribe to the newspaper or find out the nearest location at which an edition may be purchased.

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09/25/2006

Tackling homelessness in Thumb

Kate Finneren , The Huron Daily Tribune

HURON COUNTY — Whether or not some do or don't agree — or can't see it — Huron County has a fairly large homeless population, said Huron County Commissioner Mike Gage.

"We are getting bombarded by people who are in need of help," Gage said at the board's Tuesday meeting of the whole.

Advertisement

He said the Huron County Board of Commissioners more than likely will vote on a resolution this coming Tuesday in support of the Huron-Tuscola 10-year plan to end homelessness.

"It basically says housing is a basic right to everyone, and it will take a community to identify solutions to prevent homelessness," said Kathie Harrison, Huron County Homeless Coalition chairwoman.

The 10-year plan Gage was referring to is one that came about earlier this year when the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) asked the Department of Human Services to have a state plan to end homelessness in 10 years.

Following that, each county was asked to develop a county plan to end homelessness that reflected the unique needs and circumstances within their county, Harrison said.

She said Huron and Tuscola counties teamed up to create a regional plan identifying those things that need to change to accomplish this task.

Volunteers in counties began doing just that in late July by hosting "visioning sessions," where agency representatives, elected officials and other interested parties identified what needs to be done to accomplish the goal of ending homelessness within 10 years.

Harrison said a rough draft of the plan already has been sent to MSHDA, and the final draft is due Oct. 15.

"We want to say to MSHDA that this is a comprehensive report on homelessness and has the support and endorsement of government officials in our county — that they view the prevention of homelessness as a significant issue," she said.

The local 10-year plans will serve as a basis for defining community-specific priorities and resource allocation, said Michael R. DeVos, MSHDA executive director, and Marianne Udow, Michigan Department of Human Services director, in an Aug. 4 letter to community leaders.

MSHDA, for example, plans to distribute more than \$16 million in fiscal year 2007 to new initiatives that are focused on family homelessness, domestic violence, chronic homelessness and homeless youth, and linked to strategies articulated in approved local 10-year plans, the letter reads.

Gage said there currently is a lot of behind-the-scenes work to take care of some of the homeless issues in Huron County.

He said homeless individuals, among other things, are assisted in job searches, and given a temporary roof over their heads via motel vouchers purchased with funds raised throughout the year from area businesses and residents.

"Just so you understand the way the system works is we don't go out and do all the work for these folks," Gage said. "If these folks really are homeless and they really want to help themselves ... then we say to them, 'this is where you need to go,' 'this is how you need to do it,' 'if you don't have a car we'll try to get you there,' and 'if you don't have money to buy your gas to get to the job location, we will help you with some gas money.'"

He said one of the biggest issues in Huron County is youth homelessness.

"We're finding a lot of young people — 15, 16, 17 — are out of the home," Gage said. "Some of it's by their own choosing. I'm not here to defend it — I'm just saying we can't have them all on the street."

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Granholt Signs Earned Income Tax Credit/Wage Fix It Bill

MIRS, Friday, September 22, 2206

Gov. Jennifer **GRANHOLM** announced today that she has signed legislation to create an Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) for working families in Michigan and legislation fixing the state's minimum wage law by restoring certain overtime exemptions.

"Thanks to the Michigan Earned Income Tax Credit, Michigan's lowest wage earners will have up to \$880 more in their pocket," Granholm said. "And it's about time. That's \$880 to help pay for education, health care, insurance, home heating costs or whatever else they need."

Recall that the credit, [SB 0453](#), was basically the top legislative item Democrats extracted from Republicans in exchange for giving immediate effect to [HB 6213](#), which 'fixed' the minimum wage increase so that exemptions remain in place (See "[Deal Struck On Minimum Wage Fix-It](#)," 8/30/06) and was also signed into law today. Also recall that part of the story was that the Granholm administration wasn't exactly thrilled about the credit due to its projected impact on state revenues.

But regardless of the intricacies of how the credit came about, it was assumed that both Granholm and legislative Republicans would take political bows for it — and they are.

Granholt's news release on her radio address, also focused on a new pilot program aimed at making home and auto insurance available at lower rates for residents in Metro Detroit and Genesee County.

The release also included a jab at President George W. **BUSH**, by stating that last week Granholm sent a letter to the White House urging Bush to reconsider his decision to exclude Michigan from receiving additional funding for home heating assistance.

"Reducing the cost of insurance, fighting for our fair share of federal assistance for home heating, creating a tax credit to help working families - it's all part of my plan to help families work and thrive here in Michigan, especially during time of economic challenge," Granholm said.

Today Granholm also signed the following bills:

[SB 1234](#) was introduced by Sen. Alan **CROPSEY** (R-Dewitt) and makes it a crime to buy, receive, possess or conceal or help conceal stolen property.

[SB 1364](#) was introduced by Sen. Cameron **BROWN** (R-Fawn River Twp.) and makes it illegal to employ someone who's younger than 18 for less than 85 percent of the government mandated minimum wage for older workers.

[HB 4072](#) was introduced by Rep. David **HILDEBRAND** (R-Lowell) to classify horse boarding and horse training facilities as agricultural real property, rather than commercial.

[SB 0050](#), introduced by Sen. Shirley **JOHNSON** (R-Royal Oak). The bill creates a "catering permit" of on-premises licensees to serve alcohol at locations other than the licensed premises under certain circumstances. a "catering permit" of on-premises licensees to serve alcohol at locations other than the licensed premises under certain circumstances.

September 22, 2006

GRANHOLM SIGNS EARNED INCOME CREDIT, MINIMUM WAGE CHANGES

Low-income residents in the state will see up to \$880 in income tax benefits next year under legislation signed Friday by Governor Jennifer Granholm, and federal exemptions will still apply to persons earning the minimum wage. Under another bill the governor signed, teens will earn slightly less than the minimum wage.

The benefits for low-income persons is through the earned income tax credit ([SB 453](#), PA 372), which mirrors the federal program, provides an additional income set-aside for residents earning less than \$35,000 a year. For the 2008 calendar year, the state credit would be 10 percent of the federal credit, currently a maximum of \$4,700. The credit will increase in 2009 to 20 percent of the federal credit.

The provision is expected to cost the state budget \$136 million in the 2008-09 fiscal year and \$300 million in 2009-10.

“Thanks to the Michigan Earned Income Tax Credit, Michigan’s lowest wage earners will have up to \$880 more in their pocket. And it’s about time,” Ms. Granholm said. “That’s \$880 to help pay for education, health care, insurance, home heating costs or whatever else they need.”

Ms. Granholm announced the bill signing on her weekly radio address, carried by members of the Michigan Association of Broadcasters.

“The enactment of this legislation is an affirmation that the state can work in a bipartisan fashion to address the serious role that poverty plays in the life of Michigan residents,” said Michigan Catholic Conference Vice President for Public Policy Paul Long, one of those present for the bill signing in Flint. “It is my belief that SB 453 will prove to be the best piece of legislation passed this year by the state of Michigan.”

The bill was part of a deal to keep federal exemptions in the state’s increased minimum wage and has been a key issue for Democratic legislators for some years, with the push growing stronger the last couple of years as the economy in the state declined. The changes are effective October 1, concurrent with the increase in the state’s minimum wage to \$6.95, from \$5.15.

Ms. Granholm also signed the bill that began the negotiations, [HB 6213](#) (PA 373), that ensures federal exemptions to minimum wage and overtime, such as for tipped employees, continue to apply to the state minimum wage. Business and legislative leaders had feared that, under the minimum wage increase bill ([SB 318](#), PA 81), those exemptions had been erased.

[Rep. Bill Huizenga](#) (R-Zeeland), sponsor of HB 6213, said some 300,000 jobs were at risk unless the changes were enacted when the new minimum wage goes into effect October 1. “This was a much-needed bill to shore up Michigan jobs,” he said.

The package signed Friday also includes a youth minimum wage ([SB 1364](#), PA 375) that applies to those under 18. Businesses can pay the younger employees 85 percent of the current state minimum wage, as well as a lower trainee wage of \$4.25 for the first 90 days.



Granholm signs deal on tax credit, OT and youth minimum wage

9/22/2006, 4:40 p.m. ET

The Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — Gov. Jennifer Granholm signed legislation Friday that provides a state tax credit for low-income workers, maintains the status quo for overtime eligibility and creates a youth-specific minimum wage in Michigan.

The legislation is tied together as part of a compromise between the Republican-controlled Legislature and Democrats.

It allows a state earned-income tax credit on top of the existing federal credit. The credit will start at 10 percent in 2008 and rise to 20 percent in 2009. For a Michigan family with two children and \$37,000 in income, the value of the state earned-income tax credit will be about \$880 in 2009.

"That's \$880 to help pay for education, health care, insurance, home heating costs or whatever else they need," Granholm said Friday in her weekly radio address.

The compromise also establishes a youth minimum wage. The state's minimum wage of \$5.15 an hour will rise to \$6.95 starting Oct. 1, but employees under 18 will get \$5.91 an hour, or 85 percent of the minimum wage. Both minimum wages are set to rise again in 2007 and 2008.

The deal was needed because Michigan law had said certain workers — auto salespeople and others who may earn well above the minimum wage and are ineligible for overtime — could qualify for time-and-a-half pay when the state's minimum wage is higher than the federal rate of \$5.15 an hour.

The agreement keeps salespeople, truckers and other types of workers ineligible for overtime pay. Businesses had warned they might lay off workers or cut back their hours if the law was not changed.

The 20 percent earned-income tax credit is expected to lower state revenue by about \$250 million in 2009.

The earned-income tax credit bill is Senate Bill 453; the youth minimum wage bill is SB 1364; the overtime pay bill is House Bill 6213.

On the Net:

Michigan Legislature: <http://www.legislature.mi.gov>

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Muskegon Chronicle

Goal: \$20,000 to help feed hungry

Monday, September 25, 2006

By Chad D. Lerch

CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

Organizers of an annual event that raises money to feed the hungry hope to reach a milestone Sunday -- a total of \$500,000 collected in 32 years of the Tri-Cities Crop Walk.

Officials said they need to raise \$20,000 during Sunday's Crop Walk to pass the half-million dollar mark.

The Crop Walk starts at St. Mary's Church, 406 E. Savidge in Spring Lake. It includes a 4-mile course and a 1-mile course for walkers who raise money prior to the event.

Participants will have a bowl of soup and a piece of bread before walking -- symbolic of what many people in need eat in an entire day, said Eric Morgan, executive director of Love INC, an outreach ministry and food pantry in Grand Haven.

Crop Walk is a worldwide effort aimed at raising money to feed the hungry. It also raises awareness about the problem.

"We've got it really good here in the Tri-Cities area," Morgan said. "But there are many people around the world who might only get one meal a day."

Churches of all denominations work together to find walkers while Love INC coordinates the efforts, Morgan said.

Organizers are looking for more walkers. To sign up, call churches in the Tri-Cities or Love INC at (616) 846-2701. Each participant will receive a Crop Walk T-shirt.

Officials said 75 percent of the money raised will be sent to an international fund while 25 percent stays in the Tri-Cities. Morgan said the local money is shared equally between Love INC, the Salvation Army and The People Center.

Donations are given in flat rates, not per mile, organizers said. Officials hope each walker will raise \$200.

"You'll see this massive amount of hundreds of people going on this walk," Morgan said. "You'll see a sea of kids and families all walking together for the same reason."

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Food pantry to raise renovation funds

Sunday, September 24, 2006

ZEELAND -- An emergency food pantry hopes to raise at least \$20,000 for its new location. Tickets are on sale for a Thursday dinner and auction at Faith Reformed Church, 220 W. Central Ave. The event will benefit His Harvest Stand, which plans to renovate its new digs in City on a Hill ministries at the former Zeeland Community Hospital. Tickets are \$15 for individuals and \$25 for couples and may be purchased by calling 772-3772 by Monday. A silent auction begins at 6 p.m. Dinner prepared by two local chefs starts at 7 p.m. A live auction featuring a Herman Miller chair, Howard Miller clock and other locally manufactured and hand-made items follows at 8 p.m.

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Red Cross expands ride program for needy

Monday, September 25, 2006

By Jean Gallup

The Grand Rapids Press

HASTINGS -- The Red Cross has expanded a program to Barry County that provides transportation to medical appointments for seniors, the disabled or low-income residents.

The program, by the American Red Cross of Greater Grand Rapids, will take residents to medical-related appointments in either Barry or Kent counties and return them to their homes for free, said Tony Slaughter, the organization's associate director of transportation. The Red Cross already provides the transportation service to Kent County residents.

"Initially, there will be two vans to serve 45 residents taking 90 trips a week," he said.

The Area Agency on Aging and the Commission on Aging are funding the program, and the Red Cross also seeks a grant from the Barry County Foundation.

The city recently agreed to sell fuel to Red Cross vans at the Hastings Fire Department, which the organization said will be more efficient and cost effective. The city will charge 14 cents per gallon over its delivered price to cover administrative costs.

Barry County Transit, the county Commission on Aging, and the Hastings City/Barry County Airport now purchase fuel from the city.

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Don't judge Bridge Card users

FLINT JOURNAL LETTER TO THE EDITOR

MT. MORRIS

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Sunday, September 24, 2006

JOURNAL READER

This letter is to address Christina M. Weaver and her comments ["Welfare Cadillac? Grocery store cashier says she's seen it all," If You Ask Me, Aug. 13, Page C4]. How dare you sit and judge people who use a Bridge Card. Not all men are created equal, and not all Bridge Card recipients are either. So what if someone wants to blow \$50 on crab legs? Regardless of what they buy, they only get an allotted amount each month, so when it's gone, it's gone.

You, too, can buy \$50 crab legs - you just choose not to. That's the rub - you get to choose. But you would like to take choice away from people just because they receive help. You would sit back and eat your candy bars and potato chips and say to me that I have to eat what you deem appropriate for someone of my financial status.

Don't we allow the government too much power over us? Haven't we given up too much of our freedom in the name of "homeland security"? Now you would have freedom of choice of what we eat taken away, too!

I am one of those women who use a Bridge Card (because I have children, get no support from their father and I work a full-time job), and I have a Prada purse, which is a knock-off. I got the purse from knitting scarves and sewing doggie clothes. Maybe the woman you saw with the Coach handbag and hat got hers as a present from a caring grandmother. Maybe the person driving the Cadillac was borrowing it from a neighbor because he has no car of his own.

I'm not saying there is no abuse of the system; there is abuse in any system. But for those of us trying to keep our heads above water, people like you make it hard.

Betty J. Jones

Mt. Morris

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